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Associated Press

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The statistics are the first released from the 1995 National Survey of Family Growth.

Health officials credit sex education for the increase in condom use. The survey found that 91 percent of 18- and 19-year-olds had been told about birth control before they turned 18, as had about 64 percent of women between 20 and 24. Questions about sex education were not asked in the 1988 survey.

Before 1980, half of women said they used some form of birth control at first intercourse. That jumped to 76 percent in the 1990s, the survey said.

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Doubting Mom and Dad

By JON KYL

The declining well-being of America's children has left us asking ourselves, in what by now is a kind of shorthand: What has gone wrong with "the culture"? Dana Mack's answer is contained in the title of her excellent book, "The Assault on Parenthood" (Simon & Schuster, 368 pages, \$25). In the schools, in the Child Protective Services bureaus and in the courts there prevails what she calls a "cult of professional expertise" that tells parents in ways both subtle and overt that they are not fit to raise their own kids. The average parent today feels pretty intimidated by the educators, counselors, therapists and state functionaries whom Ms. Mack dubs the "child-rearing professionals."

The way these professionals see it, they have had to take over because children must be saved from the evils of the family. Their rescue efforts, as this book shows, have left too many children ill-educated, unsettled in their values and hardly less likely to be abused by those parents who truly are unfit. Parents too often describe themselves nowadays using words like "inadequate" and "helpless." The "self-esteem" of children has been pumped up ar-



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Ms. Mack interviewed many discouraged parents around the country. A mother in Texas, falsely accused by one of her neighbors of physically abusing her son, told the author: "You're never able to be the same with your kids after you go through an investigation. You're afraid. I've become less able to discipline my kids." Surveying the child-welfare literature, Ms. Mack found that 700,000 families a year are falsely reported to the authorities for child abuse. Child welfare bureaucrats chase so many frivolous cases that they haven't time to solve the real ones. As Ms. Mack explains, congressional legislation created this situation. With the best of intentions, the Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act of 1974 put in place a deadly combination: legal immunity for false reports of child abuse and legal penalties for not reporting a case.

The argument that the problems of America's children cry out for more public spending is hard to sustain in the face of Ms. Mack's analysis. The Child Protective Services failures are caused not by underfunding, she asserts, but by overreporting. Similarly, in education, per-pupil expenditures soar, but what the money is spent on is often "education lite" or worse.

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again, a noble goal—that of combating discrimination. Part of this act increased aid for minority children in the public schools. But, importantly, other provisions financed the partnership of educators and social-service providers that has steadily driven education off track. How much better would our students' unimpressive achievement scores be, she prompts us to wonder, if the school curriculum had not been colonized by the therapeutic ethic? Today, teaching the three R's takes a back seat to involving kids in "life skills" rap sessions, support groups and other activities encouraging them to correct the "narrow" views they picked up from their parents at home. One math program coordinator in Massachusetts is quoted as saying that traditional arithmetic is unfair because it imposes a "right" and a "wrong" answer, which in turn foists a "white, Western" ethos on an increasingly multicultural student population.

Child-rearing professionals have prescribed that the nuclear family undergo what Ms. Mack calls a "parentectomy." The federal courts have helped to wield the scalpel by protecting the schools from local accountability. The notion of educators being *in loco parentis* did not survive the anti-authority upheavals of the 1960s. Schools are now seen as being allied with the state rather than with the family, and when teachers and administrators circumvent parents—whether by targeting certain students for psychological counseling or by instituting graphic and panderingly hip "sex ed"—the courts tend to find in favor of the state. Ms. Mack nicely shows how the prevailing interpretation of the First Amendment enters in: If it is the state that should raise children, upholders of this doctrine are determined that it be a secularist state that vacuums the public square clean of any references to religion, meanwhile protecting in the name of free speech the raunchiest excesses of popular culture.

Is anyone resisting "parentectomy"? Indeed, the growing number of parents who educate their children at home, or who support school choice or other reforms, are finally organizing politically—though not, Ms. Mack is quick to point out, in alignment with one political party. These Americans want pro-family policies like per-child tax credits, flex-time labor laws and education vouchers, and they don't care who delivers them.

While she titles her final section on parent activism "The Familist Counterculture," the author is quite balanced. She is no advocate of a militia movement for moms. She wisely cautions that disaffection with American institutions endangers our cohesiveness as a society. The new familists are making inroads in public policy that could eventually bring us together again—if elected officials listen, and if the hubris of the "child-rearing professionals" is exposed.

Sen. Kyl (R., Ariz.) serves on the Judiciary Committee.

Protecting children is a parent's domain

By James Higgins

Who should have primary responsibility for your children's welfare: the federal government or you? If your name were Donna Shalala or Hillary Clinton, you might answer "the federal government." But if you are a sincere conservative parent, it's very likely you believe you ought to have that responsibility.

Unfortunately, a handful of normally pro-family groups don't want you to have the responsibility, at least not in cyberspace. These groups have handed over much of your parental responsibility to the Federal government by pushing into law the "Communications Decency Act," (CDA) which criminalizes "indecent" communication on the Internet.

The political world has turned upside down: some "conservatives" have lined up on the left by creating a broad new role for the federal government, while many liberals have joined traditional conservatives in viewing government power skeptically.

It seems only yesterday that conservatives were properly alarmed about politicized federal law enforcement, be it at Ruby Ridge or at the White House Travel Office. Supporters of the CDA want to let

these bygones be bygones.

The problems with the CDA are threefold: 1) It expands federal law enforcement authority at a time when conservatives should be particularly skeptical of any such expansion 2) It sets a precedent for discretionary federal regulation of the Internet. This precedent will encourage regulation by other federal agencies — notably the IRS, the FBI and the Treasury/Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms (ATF). 3) It puts at risk any speech that Clinton appointees might deem "indecent." How long will it be before the Clinton Justice Department and their liberal allies in the federal judiciary determine the on-line opposition to affirmative action is "hate speech" and is therefore "indecent"? Such a position is almost exactly what the Clinton Department of Housing and Urban Development has used against those who oppose homeless shelters in residential neighborhoods. Pro-family groups should remember the origins of their own movement: much religious conservative activism started as self-defense when Jimmy Carter's IRS and Federal Communications Commission began using this type of imaginative legal bullying against religious organizations they didn't like.

Pro-CDA groups present two arguments: 1) Federal regulation was necessary to criminalize activity that had heretofore been legal; and 2) the CDA allows adults to view any material, so long as they identi-

fy themselves by means of an ATM-type identification code. The first argument is simply wrong; the second argument is disingenuous.

Both child pornography and the sale of pornography to children, the problems the CDA purports to address, were already illegal. The pro-CDA faction claims such material was not illegal over the Internet. This assertion would come as quite a surprise to Robert and Carleen Thomas, who, as William F. Buckley points out, were recently convicted — without the help of the CDA — of transmitting child pornography by Internet.

And in an age when the media ferreted out Robert Bork's video rental records, it is not difficult to figure out the consequences of compulsory on-line identification. How long will it be before the ATF wants the name of everyone who looks at a gun-related Web site?

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that Internet regulation is not as obviously desirable as CDA supporters claim:

First, the CDA camp waved the "bloody shirt" of child pornography. CDA supporters have bluntly and publicly accused opponents of being pro-pornography. Such ad hominem nonsense is not how pro-family groups do business when facts and logic are on their side. For example, it is not necessary to invent lurid tales to discredit the welfare system. The evidence does the job. The evidence doesn't do the job of justifying CDA. CDA supporters never presented anything more than anecdotal evidence to support their position. They never even allowed a hearing on CDA.

The second tipoff was that the advocates of CDA didn't bother to inform themselves about the government's interest in the Internet. On conservative issues such as school prayer or home schooling, pro-family leaders are the most informed participants in the debate, not the least informed. The opposite is true in this case. Pro-CDA leaders uniformly seem to have been under the impression that CDA is the federal government's first foray into regulating the Internet. Wrong. The government agencies that conservatives are most concerned about have for years been trying to gain a regulatory toehold in cyberspace.

Pro-CDA organizations seem sincere in opposing child pornography but dangerously uninformed about

the precedent their approach sets. I asked one pro-CDA leader for an opinion on the Clipper Chip, the well-known Clinton-Gore initiative that would give the Government access to anyone's private electronic communication. "What's a Clipper Chip?" was the reply. When I queried another vocal CDA advocate about the risk of expanded IRS/FBI/Treasury powers, the person was surprised to learn that there is a connection between the CDA and politicized law enforcement.

None of the pro-CDA leaders seems to have been aware that a debate on encryption, on electronic transactions, and on Government cyber-snooping has been going on for years.

Finally, it should be a warning to conservatives that the CDA coalition inaccurately portrays opponents of CDA as all being American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) members. Yes, the ACLU opposes CDA. But ACLU's sociopathic view that children have a "right" to pornography is unrelated to conservative arguments against CDA.

Pre-CDA statutes have generally proved effective at keeping pornographers away from children and at punishing those few who aren't deterred. We should let existing laws continue to work. Only if existing laws prove ineffective should we consider broad Federal measures. This is the conservative approach. This is also the argument that defeated an earlier liberal cause: the Equal Rights Amendment. Why should conservatives take a stance on CDA that is the opposite of their principled stand on ERA?

Concerned parents can do better

for their children than to rely on the false promise of CDA. There are a number anti-smut software screens out on the market, all priced under \$50. (And whose would you bet on to stay ahead of cyber-smut in the future: software companies, or government bureaucrats.) I believe that there are enough concerned parents in America to create a market for such software. CDA leaders have said publicly that they believe only the government, not parents, has sufficient intelligence and sense of responsibility to manage this problem. It is amazing that one can hold such a view and still claim to be conservative.

Perhaps the oddest dimension of the "pro-family" movement's discussion of the Internet has been their exclusive focus on pornography. As James Lucier points out, advanced communication technologies — such as the Internet — offer many opportunities to promote responsible parenting. Such technologies may allow parents more time at home by reducing the need to commute, break the liberal monopoly on textbooks, and facilitate home schooling. There are already on-line adoption services. Pro-family groups should have spotted these benefits and tried to promote them. But what we've gotten is a monomaniacal discussion on one topic: pornography. Why?

As Arianna Huffington points out, this debate is not just about free speech but about "our core values and most sacred priorities." Unfortunately, the pro-CDA faction has lost sight of what those "core values and sacred priorities" are: parental responsibility and limited government.

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THE TENNESSEAN

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WEDNESDAY

JANUARY 15, 1997

Film trains teachers on tolerance of gays

Movie focuses on pupils in grades 1-8

By **BETH WARREN**
Staff Writer

MURFREESBORO — A documentary film on how teachers can promote tolerance of homosexuals to elementary school students is coming to MTSU next month with the Southeast's first screening of *It's Elementary*.

Legislators, county school boards and other educators will be invited to view the film at Middle Tennessee State University on Feb. 15 as part of the sixth annual Southeastern Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual College Conference, organizers said.

"It's a hot-button issue. I can hear it now: 'Oh, they want to teach homosexuality to elementary students,'" said Michael Grantham, a member of MTSU's Lambda Association of gay, lesbian and bisexual students, faculty and staff. "Tolerance — not homosexuality — is taught, and that's the key issue."

Debra Chasnoff, an Academy Award-winning documentary filmmaker working in San Francisco, directed the film, which is stirring debate among educators in several major U.S. cities and in Canada.

"We made this film to help open up the dialogue in this country about whether and how we should be addressing this issue in elementary classrooms ... and to counter mass information and hysteria of the Religious Right," Chasnoff said.

EDUCATION

Whom to call

The sixth annual Southeastern Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual College Conference will occur Feb. 14-16 at Middle Tennessee State University. Cost, which includes keynote speakers and the *It's Elementary* documentary, is \$30 for adults, \$18 for high school students. To register, call MTSU's Lambda Association at 780-2293.

Violence against gays and suicide among homosexuals, Chasnoff said, are reasons to teach tolerance.

Filmmakers took cameras into classrooms in several states where teachers talked about homosexuality to students in grades 1-8. The lessons were geared toward the students' ages — with first-graders reading *Heather has Two Mom-mies*, while eighth-graders discussed same-sex marriages.

Scott Link, president of MTSU's Baptist Student Union, said he's not sure how he feels about the issue.

"It's an interesting dilemma," Link said. "On one hand, if you don't discuss it, you might have someone who thinks it's OK to take a baseball bat to someone who is different. ... But you have to be very careful that you don't cross the line and say we're going to accept this as a viable, alternative lifestyle." ■

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